

THE ELEANOR ROOSEVELT PROGRAM

February 15, 1951

Description: In the opening segment, ER and Elliott Roosevelt respond to a listener's question about the Human Rights Commission and the new United Nations building. In the interview, ER's guest is Republican Senator Owen Brewster.

Participants: ER, Elliott Roosevelt, Owen Brewster

[The recording of this program has a repeated section (12:36 - 23:22) beginning from "Mother I have here..." and ending with "Alright then we'll have to try to invite him on our program...Alright." If you want to hear/read the entire program in the correct order and in its entirety begin at (11:03).]

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mother, I have here a question from Los Angeles, California. And uh I don't know whether you can fill in very much on this they're asking for a lot of information. Uh the question is, "Has the Human Rights Commission moved to the new UN building on the East River, and if so can you tell us what the building is like inside, what rooms you'll work in, and any other information that will give those of who live pretty far away a good picture of it?"

[ER:] Well now I think I can start [Elliott Roosevelt coughing] right in by explaining a little bit about the Commission and [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] and the working of this. In the first place the Commission only meets at stated periods, once or twice a year at most. This year, if the present plans carry through, it will meet in Geneva the middle of April for five to six weeks.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] Um the last time it met in New York. Now when commissions meet, any commissions, uh they meet in the rooms where the committee meetings are held during the General Assembly because those rooms are equipped with simultaneous translation booths and uh wiring and all the rest of it and it makes it possible to carry on the work of the Commission much more quickly than if you have to have um a room in which you don't have that equipment and you have to have everything translated sometimes twice. I mean you have to have French and English um all the time, but if you don't speak French or English and the speech is made in Spanish, or in Russian, or in Chinese, by then you have to have both French and English translated which means a fifteen minute speech takes three quarters of an hour uh before you're through, do you see? Now um uh that's one reason why in the new building, just as in the old buildings, the Commission Meetings will be held in the um whatever rooms are equipped for uh the General Assembly uh committee meetings and in between times for all the different commissions to meet, all the councils, or whatever it may be that is meeting.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] Now um I we uh the uh--I don't know yet whether the Human Rights Division of the Secretariat, which is the all year round working group in the Secretariat on human rights, has moved yet to the um uh building, uh the permanent building. Uh many of the Secretariat people have moved and they tell me, I haven't been over there, but they tell me the new building, which is all glass on the outside, is really a wonderful place to work in because you have light on both sides and air which is a cross current, and that as far as the functional um arrangement goes uh it is really a remarkable place to work. Now I know that Secretary General Lie has planned to have um everything um done as far as possible to make working

efficient because out of Lake Success um those who worked steadily a um all year round on questions uh take the people in the Human Rights Division were crowded into little bits of offices where the partitions didn't go up to the top, where there was no outside air um and uh you had to work under artificial light all day. Eh and it was hotter than anything in the summer and rather chilly in winter so cause there was air conditioning.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Mhm.

[ER:] and so all together, um there was, I mean there was air conditioning in the rooms downstairs, but there was not air conditioning in these rooms. [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes.] And so um all together, uh they had very bad working conditions. Now, the Human Rights Division carries on all through the year. Um it is organized under Dr. Humphreys who was head of McGill University's Law School before he came to the United Nations and uh he's a Canadian. And you have of course in every UN body representatives from all the different members uh if you can, of course you can't put in everywhere if it's not a big enough organization, sixty people, but you do have a variety of nationalities. Um he has-- he carries out in the intervals between times um the work which has been um planned in the last meeting or which um has been assigned to the Secretariat to prepare for the next meeting. He will for instance have to um have ready for us as a result of the last meeting of the uh General Assembly which suggested many things uh to be done in the first Covenant. He will have to have ready the background [ER coughs] of what has been done. He will have to have all the suggestions prepared [ER coughs] and many um uh explanations-- [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] of why they were not done before or why one should do them, why some people think one should not do them. So that we will get before the meeting a um very good uh review so to speak of many of the things that are to come up. Now in the meantime a government like ours takes what has happened in the last meeting and goes over everything very carefully. I have already been to Washington and had a session with the people assigned to work on the human rights um work in the next uh meeting. (6:42)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] And um one of them is from our legal department in the State Department, uh an absolute authority on Constitutional law, one of them is from the Department of Justice, um two of the others are lawyers but um have worked on the human rights uh declaration and now on the Covenant. They um go over very carefully all the suggestions that have been made, see how far they can within our own um Constitution be for them and prepare what our positions will be to start with in the next meeting what the reasons for those positions are-- [Elliott Roosevelt: Now they--] then we will change, of course in view of what happens in the meeting.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] But between sessions of the Human Rights Commission, they work in their various departments in Washington they don't work at--

[ER:] Not at the UN, no.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] at the UN.

[ER:] Because they are preparing the United States' position.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Only those people under Dr. Humphreys who are co-collating all of the material from the last meeting and preparing it for the next meeting.

[Simultaneously Elliott and ER] They are the ones--

[ER:] who work in the UN. And we don't have, any of us, regular offices in the UN building. [Elliott Roosevelt coughs] Only the people who are in the United Nations Secretariat have offices there. We have offices in our own mission.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] That's right.

[ER:] I have an office during the session. Now when we go out of the country as we do to Geneva, then there we are assigned an office in the um uh er--(8:23)

[Elliott Roosevelt:] whatever

[ER:] buildings, you see.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Buildings are available for the various countries.

[ER:] Yes. Because there they have um uh a very big building you see which was the old League of Nations building with plenty of offices, and they usually assign an office to each nation.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Yes.

[ER:] Uh so that each nation has a place within the building, but we also set up an office um usually wherever the headquarters of the United States may be and that's where we have stenographic help and-- [Elliott Roosevelt: Yes] perhaps whatever American reporting there is-- [Elliott Roosevelt: Mhm.] and all that type of thing.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Well now I wonder under the plan of uh the new buildings that are going up at the UN, is it planned that uh eventually the buildings will have special offices for each of the different nations' missions?

[ER:] I don't think so, but I think that they are expected to come uh around-uh around a sort of plaza eventually there and-- [Elliott Roosevelt: and each nation will erect its own mission.] all there will be buildings put up, and each nation will probably have floors in some building. For instance I know that the uh, I can't remember now if it is the Rockefeller or uh the Carnegie Foundation but anyway. One--

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Rockefeller Foundation.

[ER:] One building is going up there in which offices have been offered [Elliott Roosevelt: Mm.] to um various organizations that are interested in work for peace-- [Elliott Roosevelt: I see.] and greater understanding, and I imagine that buildings will go up and then uh the various nations will rent offices in them.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Now can you tell me just uh as a matter of interest uh are there any plans for special housing developments around the UN to house UN employees? (10:20)

[ER:] Well I've heard some plans uh being discussed because of course there is great difficulty in housing UN employees and uh they hope very much that there will be some apartment development uh so that UN people can get space and living quarters around and nearby.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] I see. Well I think it would be very interesting sometime to have somebody from uh the UN that can tell us their overall plans--

[ER:] Well I think perhaps we can get-get Mr. Trygve Lie to come and tell us something. We'll try.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Alright then we'll try to get - invite him on our program.

[ER:] Alright.

[Break 10:56-11:03]

[ER:] Good afternoon this is Eleanor Roosevelt. I am happy to welcome you for another visit here in my living room at the Park Sheraton Hotel. As usual I have a guest that you will be anxious to meet and as usual Elliott will assist me on the program. And now here is Elliott.

[Elliott Roosevelt:] Thank you, Mother. A name prominent in the Republic Party is that of Senator Owen D. Brewster of Maine. Mother has indeed been fortunate in that Mr. Brewster is her guest on the day's program. While Mother and the Senator have at times views that seem to be in opposition, it is such healthy debates as you will hear today that contribute to our great American form of government. At the foot of Forty-Ninth Street and the East River, there stands a new edifice. This is the first of the many new buildings which will house the United Nations when it is completed. Many of our listeners have expressed an interest in knowing what the interior of the completed building looks like, the decor, number of assembly rooms, and the assignment of space to commissions from various parts of the world. I'm going to ask mother to give us a first hand description. But first our announcer has a few words to say for our sponsors who make this recorded program possible. (12:35)

[Recording repeats from beginning through 10:56. Transcription skips to 23:48, when new material begins.]

[ER:] At this time in the world's history there is more debate in progress than at any other time, both nationally and internationally. Debate sometimes breeds confusion in the minds of the public and I therefore believe that we should all know as many of the facts involved as possible. For this reason I am happy that a recent trip to Washington has made it possible for me to have as my guest today one of our able senators to give his views on the present situation. I present to you the Republican Senator from Maine, Mr. Owen Brewster. (24:23)

[Owen Brewster:] I'm very happy to participate with you in a discussion because we do represent, ah historically certainly, varying points of view in a very difficult period now. And uh I think we all recognize the serious situation in which the country and the world finds itself.

[ER:] Well how serious is the crisis in which America now finds itself?

[Owen Brewster:] Well of course uh men in public and political life always think the world is coming to an end; that's part of the mechanics of the trade on both sides. But it seems to me in my uh thirty years of experience, fifteen of which were spent while your husband the President was in Washington, that we do now face, both in America and in the world, uh certain hours of decision that come only once in a century or so. I presume George Washington faced a similar period in the birth of the American Republic, Abraham Lincoln certainly did when we were at the crisis of its survival, and our early pilgrim fathers when they came over here from England after the English Revolution, which resulted in cutting off a king's head. Those are all very turbulent times, but certainly the whole world is now in a profound ideological convulsion and America seems to be, in very substantial measure, responsible for the direction civilization may now take. And it's a tremendous responsibility that we face as the tenth generation of Americans here uh after the very great progress our uh sacrificing ancestors have made. So I think it's

very very serious and it might well take a turn that might affect the whole course of civilization in the next century.

[ER:] Well I would agree with you. I think we face uh-uh and find ourselves in position of leadership, um which is the most serious that has uh probably faced any nation um in many years, and perhaps we were not quite prepared for this leadership. And perhaps um we're finding it a little difficult [ER laughs] to adjust the burden to our shoulders.

[Owen Brewster:] Well--

[ER:] and that may be one of the confusions that

[Owen Brewster:] yes

[ER:] is bothering us. So I would like to offer you--

[Owen Brewster:] Well about confusion, I'm glad you mentioned it [ER: yes.] because that is certainly very uh much in the public mind and I-I think we may draw this encouragement: that the very fact that the confusion, not only in Washington but in the country, is an indication that our liberal democratic institutions still survive and we may all debate this, and getting a hundred and fifty million people to agree is difficult. They don't have this confusion under the dictatorial systems of the Soviet. Uh ultimately--

[ER:] No there you're just told --

[Owen Brewster:] That's right.

[ER:] and then you have to go along.

[Owen Brewster:] Now ultimately--

[ER:] You have the same that thing under the Nazi.

[Owen Brewster:] Exactly.

[ER:] or fascist, you were told and you went along.

[Owen Brewster:] The totalitarian system, whether it's Soviet or fascist has the same characteristics.

[ER:] And um so our debate is healthy, I agree with you there.

[Owen Brewster:] That's true.

[ER:] On the other hand I-I find it hard sometimes to draw the line between constructive and destructive criticism and um uh how you really uh get people um to-to be sure that they're getting the facts.

[Owen Brewster:] Yes, the more nearly we can adhere to a discussion of principle as distinct from personalities I'm sure the more progress we make. Uh there is always a tendency among politicians to take one or another of the most extreme utterances of someone on the other side and then proceed with that more or less straw man to damn the whole uh outfit. Uh however profitable that may be in uh the piping times of peace I think we've got be careful about it now. And I-I feel quite a sobering influence

abroad in Washington, I want to say that on both sides, I've never seen, in spite of some caustic comments, quite as much of a tendency in the Senate for men to be pretty cautious in what they say now, they're very much concerned, that's a good symptom I think. (29:10)

[ER:] Well I-I uh I think that is a good symptom and I think the more we can leave out personalities and develop--and debate um policies uh the better it is. But I was um--I-I think certain things are disturbing at times. Now this is a little thing, but I happened to notice in the paper this morning that Margaret Chase Smith had been left off of a committee eh um I don't think people realize how much women will wonder about that because they have a great faith in Margaret Chase Smith, and she is the only woman senator.

[Owen Brewster:] Yes.

[ER:] And I think they're going to feel, um, "What does that mean?"

[Owen Brewster:] Yes.

[ER:] Does that mean a point of view isn't going to be expressed freely uh I um I-I regretted that because [Owen Brewster: Well, I'm sure we all--] I thought that it would shake confidence in a way.

[Owen Brewster:] I'm sure we all shared your concern. Certainly I as a colleague from Maine uh regretted that that development came. To what extent it was a result of the ordinary operation of the senatorial procedures and to what extent it was a discrimination against her because of uh her position uh 'cause maybe a matter of varying opinion uh I agree with you that it was unfortunate. Uh I have a very high regard for the work which Senator Smith is doing. She's in very difficult position as the only woman in a group of ninety-five men. And uh she has a woman's point of view which she very sturdily upholds.

[ER:] And she has--she has gained the confidence of women of both parties for her honesty, I mean we might not always agree with her but um [ER laughs] here am I a Democrat and yes I have a great respect for her integrity.

[Owen Brewster:] Well I think that uh the uh chief thing which has drawn very wide public attention and commendation and condemnation was her so called Declaration of Conscience. Uh in that, as you doubtless know, she was as severe in her condemnation of Senator Tydings as she was of Senator McCarthy. But in the newspaper parlance when a man bites a dog that's news [ER laughs] so when a Republican Senator spoke critically of a fellow Republican Senator that was news and the other half of her speech in which she criticized very severely the proceedings of Senator Tydings never got in the news or the public mind at all, which was a matter of considerable regret to those that appreciated her balanced point of view.

[ER:] She is a balanced person; she is a balanced person.

[Owen Brewster:] Middle of the road.

[ER:] Middle of the road.

[Owen Brewster:] She seeks to achieve and that is sometimes leads to misunderstanding. You, Mrs. Roosevelt, have not been known as much as a middle of the road person. You have been somewhat more definite and emphatic in your points of view uh tinctured if that's the proper word, with a tolerance which uh some feel goes too far. That uh in your desire to be kindly and loving, which is the great manifestation of your nature, they feel sometimes you results in your being tolerant of error, well that's a matter of judgment.

[ER:] Well I think that's quite possibly uh um a justified criticism. I um I think however, that at the present time it's better in some cases to be tolerant of what you do not quite understand because it may be an error um and you may find that you were tolerant of error too far but uh um on the other hand where you don't understand and sometimes its better to be cautious in condemnation[ER laughs]. [Owen Brewster: Mhm.] Better to lean that way than it is to lean the other way. But I quite I-I think that is a justified criticism of me. (33:40)

[Owen Brewster:] I would like to-to propose this as a matter that we might discuss and try to apply our principles of tolerance and at the same time of principle. Uh I suppose the case most in the public mind right now is the case of Nehru. I heard him referred to on the floor of the Senate the other day as "Nero." I don't know whether the man who did it did it consciously or unconsciously, uh I'm sure that's an extreme presentation, as you and I both know something of Mr. Nehru's record. But uh the American public has certainly very much concern over uh what is apparently his present position in the United Nations. And I would-I would like to know how you feel about it and how you would speak about that particular matter now.

[ER:] Well we can come back to that in one minute we have to have a station break and give our sponsors a chance and then we'll come right back to this discussion.

[Break 34:37-34:42]

[ER:] Now we can continue this interview with Senator Brewster. Um he just asked me a question before the break as to um--and mentioned the fact that in the Senator at present uh there is an almost violent reaction to Nehru's attitude. Now I understand that uh that uh feeling, because I think um we have so strongly the feeling that everybody ought to realize that um we condemned a small aggressor in the North Koreans and that we certainly should condemn the big aggressor in Communist China.

[Owen Brewster:] I'm so glad to hear you say that.

[ER:] But um I think also um that we must have patience. I hate to say this because I'm a terribly impatient person; my husband always said I'd never make a good politician because I was much too impatient. And um uh I will say that it is very hard for me to practice what I preach, but I think that we must have a little bit of um an historic view. There have been two-thousand years of peace between India and China and um there is a culture that is similar in those countries, also there is a misery among the people of those countries that is similar [Owen Brewster: Unclear] which perhaps makes a certain understanding of why China has tried the experiment of communism which they hope means reforms that they have needed and wanted for years. Now we know very well that it is just the exchange of one uh dictatorship [ER laughs] for another dictatorship. Um but, perhaps there is a greater understanding um and a greater desire to try and keep uh that understanding and not to have any kind of clash between the uh Indian people and the Chinese people. Uh I think in the end um Mr. Nehru will have to realize that for the security of all the world um aggression must be condemned and must be withstood wherever it occurs, and that if the United Nations is to survive and collective security as a hope for world peace is to have a future uh then the peoples of the world must join in combating aggression wherever it occurs.

[Owen Brewster:] I'm so glad to hear you say that. I was in India during the famine in forty-three and I saw the conditions in Calcutta, where they were terrible, so I can understand what you refer to as their misery and their sympathy with China. This also is true that China historically, like India, has not been aggressive and uh the fact that the Chinese communist leaders are now launching this unprovoked attacked in Korea uh indicates I think rather clearly to us here that it is under the instigation of Moscow rather than a manifestation of the tendencies or temperaments of the Chinese people who've never been

this way. Now if Mr. Nehru, who has been so close to it and who is a very cultured, and a highly educated man, and knows his history. I was in India when he was in prison, I had letters to him from his daughter which I couldn't present. Uh so I realize what he's been through, but uh it is more noblesse oblige, those who have been highly educated are greatly responsible and uh it does seem to me, as I gather it does to you--you said in the end he must recognize and I feel the end is rather near, that he must very shortly realize that the American people are deeply disturbed. Although this tendency to compromise with uh communistic aggression and error and uh I think every influence we can bring to bear him-- you'd probably have more influence with him than I would.

[ER:] Well I have no influence I'm afraid, Senator, but I think the--the um feeling of the American people, as you describe it, is a quite natural feeling and um I think it will have its effect.

[Owen Brewster:] That was shown in the vote in both the House and Senate, those overwhelming votes, which manifested our mail which is overwhelming, the Senate voted ninety-one to nothing, wasn't a dissenting voice. (39:45)

[ER:] Oh I don't think that there is any question of how the people feel, but I think it is understandable that there is a great desire on the part of the Indian representatives, if they possibly can, to bring about a peaceful solution in Korea, and of all Asiatic questions if they possibly can. Now we do have to realize that there is something new stirring in the world, its stirring and--

[Owen Brewster:] Well I think there I quite agree with you, there's something stirring, the is question what it is.

[ER:] And I think it's instigated-- it's used very often by the USSR. It's a um it is a feeling there, and unfortunately they don't always recognize when it's being used by the USSR.

[Owen Brewster:] Well that is where --

[ER:] That's the difficulty. (40:35)

[Owen Brewster:] That's where I feel that Mr. Nehru, who is very intelligent and highly educated, should realize more than anyone else in Asia, that this present Chinese aggression under General Mao is primarily motivated not by a desire to liberate Asia or the Asiatic but by the Moscow determination of conquest. As General Mao has testified publically and repeatedly, that he owes his entire success in securing dominance in China to the assistance of Moscow, that he owes them eternal allegiance, he's made a treaty with them to fight on their side, and that it isn't an Asiatic thing at all. It is--a it is a Russian, Soviet, communist, atheistic, uh domination of Asia, that is the issue and Mr. Nehru could do more than anyone else to clarify that if he would only recognize, what are to us, the obvious facts of life. (41:33)

[ER:] Well, I think those are all obvious to us and um uh I think they will become so, at least I hope they will become uh clear, uh to um Mr. Nehru and to the Indian leaders. I of course could never consent to the not saying who were aggressors, that seems to me a terrible thing, but as to what then happens if there is a way of bringing about some kind of a peaceful um [ER clears throat] negotiation [ER coughs] because I am opposed, always, to this horrible habit we have of killing each other first and then sitting down around a table, I'd like to sit around the table first and-- [ER laughs].

[Owen Brewster:] Well I'm sure that everyone shares your desire. You know they say that a philosopher is one who can endure with equanimity the ills of others and I think uh most of the mothers in America are thinking of their boys over in Korea now and what they're going through and it is very difficult for them to be tolerant of the philosophy with which Mr. Nehru views this situation. I believe--

[ER:] You are not telling me anything, I get letters from poor mothers [Owen Brewster: Yes] so often.

[Owen Brewster:] Well I think --

[ER:] every day.

[Owen Brewster:] we've got to be-- Jesus finally moved in on the temple when he cleaned out the money-changers and he showed a divine wrath. He said, "I come not to bring peace, but a sword." And I think that America must assert itself and its leadership on this great moral issue and I think the United Nations are-are trafficking with the very life. That great building on the East River may become just nothing but a magnificent mausoleum like the one on the shores of Lake Geneva where the League of Nations is interred unless these nations wake up. Uh they want us to give two million tons of grain to India, is that wise today? (43:33)

[ER:] I think perhaps uh those two million tons uh will be more um useful than many of our other arguments. I think that um if we show that we really mean what we say--this is not purely a military struggle, this is a struggle uh which is economic in that we must help to increase the well being of the peoples of the world. And it's also a moral and spiritual struggle because, you'll know that they can watch us and see everything that democracy means, where they can only accept promises from the Soviets and therefore [Owen Brewster clears throat] we have to realize that [Owen Brewster clears throat] we are-we are meeting a tremendous test for the American--

[Owen Brewster:] Well I think we must realize Mrs. Roosevelt that the American people since the war have given over forty billion dollars worth of things of various kinds to alleviate suffering in the world and rebuild their economy, and yet at uh Dublin in September at the Inter-Parliamentary Union, I heard the representatives of India and the other countries denounce us as imperial colonialists. Now it indicates that the same problems we have in private charity exist in international and the people of the world don't seem to have understood us. Look at all these people we've helped in the United Nations who now uh voted us down, the other day twenty-seven to twenty-three, I thought that was a terrible thing.

[ER:] I know-I know all of that, and I recognize even better than you do our position um in uh--with certain peoples of the world, particularly the colored peoples of the world. Uh there are great many things that enter into it, but I think much depends on how we show what we really mean now.

[Owen Brewster:] How long can we can keep on with this, how long can our economy stand it?

[ER:] I think it's a terrific thing to ask our people, but I think our economy can stand it if we are willing to give, with the realization that it does mean a victory for democracy in the future.

[Owen Brewster:] But you must bring forth fruits, meat for repentance, and it seems to me that our experience for the last five years in giving this aid has not been very fruitful at the United Nations. Here they are now criticizing us as impulsive, as irresponsible--[ER: Why--] as warmongers and all sorts of things.

[ER:] (46:15) Why I think it's been fruitful, but uh we are not just conscious of the last five years, we have to take a hundred years and more. Um and I wish we could carry this on, I'd love to carry it on but unfortunately our time has come to an end. The only thing I would like to say is that I believe strongly that we are going to win and I believe our people are going to win and I believe we're going to stand as moral leaders. (46:52)

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